

Swabian Fruit Loaf (,Hutzelbrot')

“The ‘Hutzelmännchen’ (a gnome) grew tired of his master Seppe, a cobbler, and gave him two pairs of lucky shoes and a special loaf called ‘Hutzelbrot’ for his journey. He hoped the gifts would prepare his master for his long journey from Stuttgart to Ulm and beyond...”

With these words our trip begins with Seppe the journeyman Cobbler, a character from the swabian author Eduard Mörike, from Stuttgart to Ulm.

The ‘Hutzelbrot’ was special because it could never be finished. It could be eaten but would then always replenish itself. A fact that poor Seppe sadly never realises during his travels.

The recipe for the ‘Hutzelbrot’ is sadly not shared by the author. We are only given a small clue from the breads baker, the ‘Hutzelmännlein’. It was short and stout, small and wrinkled. Just like the ‘Hutzel’ itself, from which the bread is made, a slowly dried pear leftover from the harvest.

‘Hutzelig’ describes something wrinkled and shrivelled in the swabian dialect and in this sense the fruit fits perfectly with its namesake. As does the Cider made from the ‘Hutzel’, which should only be cautiously drunk fresh, with its sharp, sour, and sometimes bitter taste.

The fruit is however traditionally dried when still sweet and has a long lifespan. The drying of fruit is one of the oldest methods of conserving food, in this sense it comes as no surprise that ‘Otzi’, the natural mummy discovered in the Alps, was discovered with them in his provisions.

So how does one bake the swabian fruit loaf? The search for a genuine, definitive recipe is somewhat futile. There are probably as many versions of the recipe as there are swabian households. They span from simple ‘Birrawegga’ versions to incredibly rich Stuttgart fruit loafs.

The ‘Hutzelbrot’ was originally a hefty fruit loaf baked in the country. A traditional bread which the wives of farmers refined with whichever sweet ingredients they had to hand such as; dried pears, damsons and honey. Local nuts were also used. Over time, with increasing prosperity and the need for more prestige, the recipes became more exotic. Fruit from increasingly more distant lands were used. Apricots and Figs, Sultanas and candied orange and lemon peels, almonds and expensive spices were all integrated into recipes.

Traditionally the ‘Hutzelbrot’ was baked before the first festival of Advent. It was prepared with great care because any mishaps were said to be a sign of bad luck for the coming year. The loaf was then eaten on Christmas Eve (24th Dec) or on the feast of Saint Stephan (26th Dec) generously served with fresh butter. Even the livestock in the stables became a share of the loaf in order to bring good health and yields for the coming year.

For our recipe we have attempted to draw on the heritage of the older traditional recipes. To stay true to the traditions of the region. The recipe is only somewhat refined with some ‘exotic’ spices which were already available since the late Middle Ages.